A HISTORY OF ARGENTINE POLITICAL THOUGHT

Posted on 05/01/2023 by Facundo Iturburu



JOSEPH T. CRISCENTI

American historians and political scientists interested in the political development of Latin America have long felt the need for making available to an English-reading audience the more significant works published by the Latin Americans themselves. They thus will be grateful to Professor Thomas F. McGann and Stanford University Press for an excellent and faithful English reedition of Romero's Las ideas políticas en Argentina. A pioneer effort to explain the impact of ideas, foreign and native, and of economic and social forces on the Argentines down to the Perón era, Romero's monograph was an immediate success from the time it first appeared in 1946. It is now in its third Spanish edition, an indication that time has not diminished the importance of Romero's contribution to Argentine cultural history.

What Romero presents is only partially a synthesis of the thoughts of other observers of the Argentine scene. This is especially true of his treatment of the 1810 to 1880 period. Here, he reveals his general acceptance of the liberal porteño thesis that the central problem during these years was to reconcile the divergent views of the enlightened porteño creoles and the anti-liberal and relatively backward and politically less experienced rural and urban creoles of the interior on how to organize the nation. The former sought to establish the viceroyalty as the fatherland and a centralized government, the latter, emotionally attached to their own locality or province, refused to admit that the nation already existed and favoured the federalist principle. The years after 1880 are analysed in terms of the economic and social transformation Argentina experienced as a result of the influx of foreign capital and European immigrants, the expansion of the railroads, and the rise of a middle class and proletariat. This analysis is influenced by the author's socialist leanings.

Romero's work is especially noteworthy because of his attempt "to define the basic patterns" of the Argentine past. Herein lies his originality. From colonial times to the present, he finds, two factors have moulded the evolution of Argentina. One is a struggle between two political principles, authoritarianism and liberalism, for supremacy. The other is the attempt to impose on Argentina an institutional structure that failed to consider the Argentine reality. A study of these two factors suggests to Romero that Argentine history may be divided into three periods, the colonial era, the criollo era (1810-1880), and the "alluvial" era (1880 to the present). His conclusions are that the political liberals have been the enemies of popular democracy and the supporters of economic liberalism, whereas the democratic masses have endorsed economic nationalism, the intervention of the State in economic nationalism, the intervention of the State in economic life, and dictatorship.

For this edition, McGann has written a very stimulating essay in which he compares Argentine and

United States developments. His observations are very apropos. He also has contributed a glossary of Spanish words and names, and a selected bibliography of works in English. Altogether, this is a work all Americans interested in Latin America, and especially in Argentina, should read.